

The AZOTH Ritual

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As a visual guide to the operations of alchemy, we will use an alchemical mandala actually used by the alchemists in trying to understand the relationships between the processes of transformation. The "Azoth" (shown above) is a meditative emblem that appeared in several different forms during the late Middle Ages. The version we are using is based on an illustration first published in 1659 in the *Azoth of the Philosophers* by the legendary German alchemist Basil Valentine. The word "Azoth" in the title is one of the more arcane names for the First Matter. The "A" and "Z" in the word relate to "alpha" and "omega," the letters at the beginning and end of the Greek alphabet. Thus the word is meant to

convey the idea of the absolutely complete and full meaning of the First Matter and its transformations. In this sense, the Azoth represents not just the chaotic First Matter at the beginning of the Work but also its perfected essence (the Philosopher's Stone) at the conclusion of the Work.

At the center of this striking drawing is the face of a bearded alchemist at the beginning of the Work. Like looking into a mirror, this is where the adept fixes his or her attention to begin meditation at the center of the mandala. The downward-pointing triangle superimposed over the face of the alchemist represents Water in its highest sense as divine grace or the gift of life pouring down from Above. Therefore, within the triangle we see the face of God, and the drawing clearly implies that the face of God and the face of the alchemist are the same. Of course, this idea was considered blasphemy to the medieval Church, which explains why this drawing was circulated secretly in so many different forms during the Middle Ages. It was not until the Renaissance, when the idea of the divine nature of man, that the drawing was first published.

The schematized body of the alchemist is shown in perfect balance with the Four Elements as depicted by his arms and legs. His feet protrude from behind the central emblem, and one is on Earth and the other in Water, indicating he is grounded in the real world. In his right hand is a torch of Fire and in his left hand a feather symbolizing Air. Although he is firmly planted in the world of matter, the alchemist has easy access to the powers of spirit.

The alchemist also stands balanced between the masculine and feminine powers in the background. He is really the offspring of the marriage between Sol, the archetypal Sun King seated on a lion on a hill to his right, and Luna, the archetypal Moon Queen seated on a great fish to his left. "Its father is the Sun," says the Emerald Tablet, "its mother the Moon."

The jovial, extroverted Sun King holds a scepter and a shield indicating his authority and strength over the rational, visible world, but the fiery dragon of the rejected contents of his unconscious waits in a cave beneath him ready to attack should he grow too arrogant. This dragon is created by the fiery nature of consciousness any time we forcibly reject part of the contents of our psyche and relegate it to the shadows. We have given this undesirable part life energy in the very act of rejection. The fact that light casts shadows is inherent in masculine consciousness, and it becomes a source of demons that plague us throughout our lives.

The melancholy, introverted Moon Queen holds the reins to a great fish, symbolizing her control of those same hidden forces that threaten the King, and behind her is a chaff of wheat, which stands for her connection to fertility and growth. The bow and arrow she cradles in her left arm symbolize the wounds of the heart and body she accepts as part of her existence, for feminine consciousness accepts the world as it is, with all its pain and suffering.

In simplest terms, the King and Queen represent the raw materials of our experience – thoughts and feelings – with which the alchemist works. The King symbolizes the power of thought and planning, which are characteristics of spirit. The Queen stands for the influence of feelings and emotions, which are ultimately the chaotic First Matter of the soul. The much heralded marriage of the King and Queen produces a state of consciousness best described as a feeling intellect, which can be raised and purified to produce a state of perfect intuition, that Egyptian alchemists referred to as "Intelligence of the Heart." This special kind of intelligence or way of knowing is at work in the alchemist, for he is born of the sacred marriage of masculine and feminine consciousness.

Between legs of the alchemist dangles the Cubic Stone, which is labeled *Corpus* (meaning "body"). The five stars surrounding it indicate that the body also contains the hidden Fifth Element, the invisible Quintessence whose "inherent strength is perfected if it is turned into Earth" in the words of the Emerald Tablet.

Where the head of the alchemist should be, there is a strange winged caricature. This represents the Ascended Essence, the essence of the soul raised to the highest level in the body. This image evolved through the decades with this drawing, and at one time or another was shown as a golden ball, a helmet, a heart, and finally as a depiction of the pineal gland (a light-sensitive, pinecone-shaped organ at the center of the brain).

Touching the wings of the Ascended Essence are a salamander engulfed in flames on the left side of the drawing and a standing bird on the right. Below the salamander is the inscription *Anima* (Soul); below the bird is the inscription *Spiritus* (Spirit). The salamander, as a symbol of soul, is attracted to the blazing heat of the Sun, while the bird of spirit is attracted to the coolness of the Moon. This is a visualization of the fundamental bipolar energies that drive the alchemy of transformation. This is similar in meaning to the Tai Chi symbol representing the interplay of the feminine yin and masculine yang energies. In this process, one thing takes on the characteristics of the other as it becomes its opposite. This is the relationship between Mercury and Sulfur in alchemy, and explains why Mercury is sometimes associated with soul and other times associated with spirit. The same is true of Sulfur. The alchemists believed that within this interplay could be found the source of the life force. Carl Jung called this overall process of one thing changing its opposite by the unfortunately unwieldy name of "inandromedria."

Spiritus, *Anima*, and *Corpus* (Spirit, Soul, and Body) form a large inverted triangle that stands behind the central emblem of the alchemist. Together they symbolize the Three Essentials behind anything, the celestial archetypes that the alchemists termed Sulfur, Mercury, and Salt.

Operation 1: Calcination

The star-shaped pattern that makes up the body of the alchemist represents what Paracelsus called the "star in man," the hidden process that is going on in our souls, just as it is the hidden process behind the evolution of the *Anima Mundi* or the soul of the universe. The first ray in this inner star is the black ray labeled number one and pointing to the Corpus Stone. It represents the beginning of the Ladder of the Planets and is marked by the cipher that stands for both the metal lead and the planet Saturn. This is archetypal situation at the beginning of the Work. The square symbol for Salt is also shown in the first ray, which indicates the Work begins in the unredeemed matter of an imperfect incarnation. It could be any substance that needs to be perfected from lead to the human soul.

Movement through the Azoth is clockwise, and between each step on the Planetary Ladder are a series of circles that show how to proceed to the next step or transform the current situation. These are the operations of alchemy. The first circle shows a black crow perching on top of a skull. Next to the first circle (between the first and second rays) is the Latin word *Visita*, which means to visit or start a journey. Black crows are symbols of the initial Black Phase (the *Nigredo*) of alchemy, during which the subject of transformation is purified by breaking it down.

The scene in the circle represents the first operation of Calcination, which works with the element Fire to burn away dross and reveal hidden essences. The word "Calcination" (and such related words as "calcify" and "calcium") are from the Latin root *calx*, which means limestone or bone. To calcine something is to burn it until it turns chalky white, reduce it to ashes, or cremate it. After Calcination, the substance at hand is no longer affected by common fire.

Fire was very important to alchemists, who were often called "Philosophers of Fire." They believed it was the primary agent of transformation. "All our purifications are done in fire, by fire, and with fire,"

noted the twentieth-century alchemist Fulcanelli. "Become acquainted with the secrets of fires," counseled alchemist Daniel Mylius (*Philosophia Reformata*, 1622), "and the true achievements of our Medicine, which lead easily to the achievement of the Magistry."

The skull in the first circle is the classic symbol of the process of Calcination. Other images at this stage include funeral pyres, hell, bonfires, blazing furnaces (athanors), crucibles, salamanders, the Red Lion fighting other animals, the Sun and Moon roasting over flames, the King being burned alive, cremated, or sitting inside a sweat box. Another Calcination image is a yellow lion devouring or struggling with a green snake. The lion represents the fiery principle of Sulfur and the Secret Fire in the alchemist's soul. The green serpent is unrefined or unclean Mercury that must be redeemed during Calcination. In the alchemist, this is the false identity or poisoning ego that fights desperately for its survival but must be devoured in the flames of higher consciousness.

In laboratory Calcination, a substance is heated over an open flame or in a crucible until it is reduced to ashes. Alchemists considered acids, especially Vitriol, as a kind of liquid fire that also was considered a process of Calcination. Vitriol is a thick green substance that forms from the weathering of sulfur-bearing rocks. It is a combination of iron and sulfuric acid that fascinated the alchemists. Sulfuric acid became the fire that drove hundreds of chemical reactions. It is a powerful corrosive that eats away flesh and all metals except gold.

Physiologically, the Fire of Calcination can be experienced as the metabolic discipline or aerobic activity that tunes the body, burning off excesses from overindulgence and producing a lean and efficient body. Bodily Calcination begins in the Base or Lead Chakra at the sacral cup at the base of the spine. On the planetary level, it is the Fire of creation, the formation of a livable environment from molten matter and volcanic ashes.

Psychologically, this operation involves the destruction of ego and our attachments to material possessions. Calcination is usually a natural humbling process as we are gradually assaulted and overcome by the trials and tribulations of life, though it can be a deliberate surrender of our inherent hubris gained through a variety of spiritual disciplines that ignite the fire of introspection and self-evaluation. In society, the Calcination is expressed in the lives of revolutionaries, conquerors, and other warriors who try to overthrow the status quo.

Operation 2: Dissolution

The second ray of in the star of the Azoth points toward the King, and the operation here is directed toward masculine consciousness and signatures. This is the second rung on the Ladder of the Planets and is marked with the symbol that stands for both the metal tin and the planet Jupiter. This ray is usually white or light blue in color.

The second circle depicts the operation of Dissolution and shows the black crow watching itself dissolve before its eyes to reveal its white or purer part. Reflecting back from the pool of Dissolution is the white image of the Soul Bird, which is exposed during this operation. This is still the Black Phase of alchemy, and the process of purification continues. In the outer ring next to the circle of Dissolution is the word *Interiora*, meaning the operation takes place in the interior or innermost parts.

Images of Dissolution include retorts, tears, menstruation, floods, melting, orgies, Mother Nature, water springing from the earth, plants blooming with seven flowers, poisonous toads, the King swimming naked, the King and Queen sitting in a bath together, dark dragons, basilisks (winged

serpents), and demons guarding secret treasures. Another image of Dissolution is the Sun and Moon surrounded by total darkness with a white bird descending from the sky. One frequent image of Dissolution is the Green Lion reaching up to devour the Sun. The Green Lion is the purified Green Snake of Calcination, purified and alive during Dissolution. But the Green Lion is still imperfect Mercury, although it is now imbued with the soul's sincere desire to ascend. On the chemical level, the Green Lion is the purified Vitriol, the *Aqua Regia* acid that can dissolve even gold.

In the laboratory, the second operation involves dissolving the ashes from Calcination in water, acid, or other solution. These ashes are sometimes called the Salt of the Stone (*Sal Salis*), which is the inner matrix that carries all the essences that later become the Philosopher's Stone. In summing up the important transition from the operation of Calcination to the operation of Dissolution, Daniel Stolicus wrote (*Chemishes Lustgaertlein*, 1625): "The fiery man will sweat and become hot in the fire. Also will he resolve his body and carry it far through moisture."

Psychologically, Dissolution represents a further breaking down of the artificial structures of the psyche by total immersion in the unconscious, the rejected part of our consciousness. Within the alchemist, the dissolving Water of Dissolution can take the form of dreams, voices, visions, and strange feelings which reveal a less ordered and less rational world existing simultaneously with our everyday life. During Dissolution, the conscious mind lets go of control to allow the surfacing of buried material and tied up energy. Dissolution can be experienced as "flow," the bliss of being well-used and actively engaged in creative acts without personal hang-ups or established hierarchy getting in the way. In society, the process of steady growth through gradual Dissolution is exemplified by monastic, nature-based, or agrarian lifestyles.

Physiologically, Dissolution is the continuance of the *kundalini* experience, the opening-up of energy channels in the body to recharge and elevate every single cell. Dissolution takes place in the Genital or Tin Chakra and involves changes in the lungs and spleen. On the planetary level, Dissolution is the Great Flood, the cleansing of the earth of all that is inferior.

Operation 3: Separation

The third ray of the Azoth points toward the torch of Fire and is marked with the cipher signifying both the metal iron and the planet Mars. This ray is usually colored red or orange and is also marked with a smaller symbol denoting Sulfur. Iron and sulfur come together chemically in Vitriol or sulfuric acid, the aggressive and biting liquid fire of the alchemists.

The third circle shows the operation of Separation in which the black, earthbound Soul Bird splits into two white birds that retrieve the saved remains of Calcination and Dissolution. This is the first coming together of soul and spirit, and the newly acquired vantage point allows the discernment of what is worthy of being saved from the previous two operations. Above this circle is the written *Terrae*, which means "of the earth" and refers to the real or manifested essences being separated out from the dregs of matter at this stage.

At this stage, the saved elements are pure but opposite and were often seen at war or struggling with each other. It can be a tortuous time that demands will and determination. To keep the fighting essences alive yet separate, the alchemists made use of ascending and purifying operations associated with Air. Of this phase, the Emerald Tablet says, "The Wind carries it in its belly," and the alchemists felt they were applying the Element Air in their work during Separation.

"On this third rung of the Ladder of the Wise," noted Daniel Mylius in his *Philosophia Reformata* (1622), "the warring elements previously mentioned and distinguished from each other, are separated by a rectifying distillation. Therefore, the third step is called Our Separation."

Images for the Separation process include filter funnels, piles of sand or dirt, knights wielding swords, the caduceus as a weapon, divorce, dismemberment, surgery, splitting of the Red Sea, breaking apart of heaven and earth, scenes from the Apocalypse, and complicated geometric diagrams such as the Squaring of the Circle. Alchemical engravings often show white birds taking flight at this stage, sometimes with images of fire, destruction, and a blackened earth below symbolizing the results of the earlier operations. Another popular image is that of a youthful Hermes (or Mercury) wearing full armor and trying to separate the arguing King and Queen, like a teenaged boy in a family dispute.

Laboratory Separation is the isolation of the components of Dissolution by filtration or fractional distillation and then discarding any impure or unworthy material. It is the isolation of the desired components from the previous two purification operations (Calcination and Dissolution). In the laboratory, the components of the polluted solution from Dissolution are separated out by filtration, cutting, settling, or agitation with air. Any dead or unworthy material is then discarded.

Psychologically, this process is the rediscovery of our essence and the reclaiming of dream and visionary "gold" previously rejected by the masculine, rational part of our minds. It is, for the most part, a conscious process in which we review formerly hidden material and decide what to discard and what to reintegrate into our refined personality. Much of this shadowy material is things we are ashamed of or were taught to hide away by our parents, churches, and schooling. Separation is letting go of the self-inflicted restraints to our true nature, so we can shine through. The process of Separation retrieves the frozen energy released from the breaking down of habits and crystallized thoughts (assumptions, beliefs, and prejudices) and hardened feelings (emotional blockages, neuroses, and phobias). This misspent energy is now available to drive our spiritual transformation. In Society, Separation is expressed as the establishment of clans, cities, and nationalities.

Physiologically, Separation is following and controlling the breath in the body as it works with the forces of Spirit and Soul to give birth to new energy and physical renewal. Separation begins in the Navel or Iron Chakra located at the level of the solar plexus. Separation on the planetary level is represented by the formation of landmasses and islands from the powerful forces of Air, Water, Earth, and Fire.

Operation 4: Conjunction

The fourth ray of the Azoth points to the area at the top of the drawing where the right wing of the Ascended Essence touches the salamander wallowing in flames. The ray is marked with the single symbol for both copper and Venus and is usually colored green or yellow-green.

The fourth circle depicts the twin birds of soul and spirit leaving the earth together, lifting a five-spiked crown (the Fifth Element or Quintessence recovered from the preceding operations) into heaven or the realm of spirit. At this point in the Work, only the purest and most genuine parts of the substance to be transformed remain in the vessel. The goal of the Conjunction operation is to recombine these saved elements into a whole new incarnation. As the Emerald Tablet says of this stage, "Its nurse is the Earth," and the alchemists felt they were working with the Element Earth during Conjunction.

Above this circle is inscribed the word *Rectificando*, which means "by rectification" or setting things right, and the wings of the Ascended Essence spread over this operation as if to bless it. It is truly a sacred process. The alchemists often referred to the Conjunction as the "Marriage of the Sun and Moon," which symbolized the two opposing ways of knowing or experiencing the world. Solar consciousness is intellectual and relies on rational thought; lunar consciousness is feeling based and taps into non-rational sources of information like psychic impressions and intuition. After this Marriage of the Mind, the initiate experiences an increase in intuitive insight and the birth of Intelligence of the Heart. This newly found faculty produces a sense of reality superior to either thought or feeling alone.

Conjunction is more than a simple marriage however. It is actually an alchemical crucifixion in which the substance at hand (or the alchemist) is nailed (or fixed) on a cross between the Vertical Axis of reality and the Horizontal Axis of reality. In the vertical orientation, Conjunction is the attempted union of the forces of spirit Above and matter Below. As can be seen in the Azoth drawing, Conjunction is really a turning point from working with the first three operations Below (in matter) and working with the last three operations Above (in spirit).

In the horizontal orientation of left and right, the Conjunction is an attempt to balance the masculine consciousness of the King with the feminine consciousness of the Queen. As can be seen in the Azoth drawing, Conjunction marks balancing point between the forces of the *Anima* (Soul) on the alchemist's right side to the forces of the *Spiritus* (Spirit) on the alchemist's left side. In fact, it is the alchemical crucifixion at the center of the vertical and horizontal realities that makes Conjunction the most significant operation in alchemy.

Images of horizontal Conjunction include the fruitful earth, sexual intercourse, rams and satyrs, double-chambered furnaces (athanors), glue or tape binding opposing entities, two streams coming together in one stream, Janus or double-faced people, people wearing crowns, and the hermaphrodite. Often engravings show the King and Queen in reconciliation at this stage, with Hermes (or Mercury) joining them in an embrace or handshake. In some of these drawings, Hermes is shown with a wry smile or even with two faces. This is a subtle revelation that the Conjunction is really a good-natured ruse by the notorious trickster, who knows that both the King and Queen must die or sacrifice their identities in the marriage to produce the Child of the Philosophers, which is all Hermes really cares about.

Images of the vertical Conjunction include the Ladder of the Planets, seven stars on an object inclined upwards, and rainbows (the seven colors in harmony). Other images are a white bird descending into flames, a bird chained to an earthbound animal, the Red Lion partly disappearing into a sphere, or stylized representations of the union of Fire and Water. Carl Jung suggested that angels coming down from heaven and the landing of UFOs were also images of vertical Conjunction, in the obvious sense of the union between the powers Above with the powers Below.

In the laboratory, the operation of Conjunction is the recombination of the saved elements from Separation into a new substance. Often this was a forced marriage done by fusing or amalgamating metals or by mixing saved components in a new chemical reaction by the addition of a temporary mediator such as an acid or a catalyst.

Physiologically, Conjunction is using the body's sexual energies for personal transformation. Conjunction takes place in the body at the level of the Heart or Copper Chakra. On the planetary level, Conjunction occurs when primordial life forms are created from the energy of the Sun or lightning.

Psychologically, Conjunction is empowerment of our true selves, the union of both the masculine and feminine sides of our personalities into a new belief system or an intuitive state of consciousness. The alchemists referred to it as the Lesser Stone, and after it is achieved, the adept is able to clearly

discern what needs to be done to achieve lasting enlightenment. Often synchronicities begin to occur at this stage that confirm the alchemist is on the right track in his or her personal transformation. In society, it is the growth of crafts and technology to master the environment.

Operation 5: Fermentation

The fifth ray of the Azoth points to the area where the left wing of the Ascended Essence touches the standing bird of Spirit. The ray is marked with the cipher for the metal Mercury (Quicksilver) and the planet Mercury, as well as an identical smaller symbol indicating the heavenly principle of Mercury. This ray is usually colored blue-green or green, symbolizing the living energy of transformation spoken of in the Emerald Tablet or what the Sufis called the "Emerald Vision."

The fifth circle is under the inscription *Invenies*, which means "you will discover." This is the operation of Fermentation in which the unexpected mystic substance forms, the ambrosia of the gods, which represents the first lasting solidification of the conjoining of soul and spirit. The circle shows the Soul and Spirit birds nesting in a tree, brooding over their Egg, waiting for the mystical birth to occur.

Fermentation is the introduction of new life into the product of Conjunction to completely change its characteristics, to completely raise it to a whole new level of being. The Emerald Tablet tells us to leave the earthly realm by the fire of imagination, "gently and with great Ingenuity," into a state that sets our soul afire with higher passion. This is the second or higher application of the Fire Element in the tablet, and the alchemists thought of it as working with the heavenly substance of Sulfur.

Like natural fermentation, alchemical Fermentation is a two-stepped process that begins with Putrefaction, which in which the matter is allowed first to rot and decompose and then to ferment or come alive again in spirit. In his *Chemisches Lustgaertlein* (1625), alchemist Daniel Stolcius describes the importance of this uncomfortable phase: "Destruction brings about the Death of the material. But the spirit renews, like before, the Life. Provided that the seed is putrified in the right soil – otherwise all labor, work, and art will be in vain."

Images of the Putrefaction phase of Fermentation include corpses, graves, coffins, funerals, guardian angels, massacres, mutilation, worms, rotting flesh, Drawings of this phase occasionally depict a bird descending into a pitch black sky or caught lost in the dark clouds during a thunderstorm. Skeletons or black crows standing on corpses or rotting balls of earth are also seen. Images of Fermentation include scenes of sowing and germination, greenness and rebirth. Sometimes the King and Queen are shown with wings or as angels to emphasize their spiritized form.

Laboratory Putrefaction begins with the rotting of the plant material or substance of transformation. The alchemists often added manure to help get the process going. The sign that Putrefaction is nearing its end is a milky white fluid that appears like a tunnel of white light in the black, rotting material. The dead material seems to come to life again with an influx of digesting bacteria, as Fermentation begins. This is the introduction of new life into the product of Conjunction to revive and rejuvenate it in a process of spiritization. Finally, out of the utter blackness of Putrefaction comes the yellow Ferment, which appears like a golden wax flowing out of the foul matter. Chinese alchemists called this substance the Golden Pill, which marked their intermediary Yellow Phase (the *Xanthosis*), a alchemical transition also recognized by Alexandrian alchemists. The production of the Ferment or Golden Pill is heralded by the formation of an iridescent, oily film the alchemists named the *Cauda Pavonis* ("Peacock's Tail").

We see this process most clearly in the making of wine. First, the grapes are "sacrificed" or crushed to release their essences in the juice. Then, Putrefaction begins as the juice is allowed to decompose and rot. Next, a white layer of digesting bacteria arises that begins the process of Fermentation. This phase is also sometimes marked by waxy substance the alchemists called the Ferment and an oily film known as the Peacock's Tail. Finally, the new life force "conquers" the original identity of the grape juice and supplants it with a new and higher presence or life. This higher presence is released during the next operation (Distillation), which produces the true Spirit of Wine (its alcohol), which contains the purified essence of grapes.

Psychologically, this process is the death of the feeble (or unstable) Child of the Conjunction that will eventually result in its resurrection to a new level of being. Fermentation starts with the inspiration of spiritual power from Above that reanimates, energizes, and enlightens the alchemist. Out of the blackness of the alchemist's despair (Putrefaction) comes a brilliant display of colors and meaningful visions (the Peacock's Tail.) Fermentation can be achieved through various activities that include intense prayer, desire for mystical union, breakdown of the personality, transpersonal therapy, psychedelic drugs, and deep meditation. Thus, personal Fermentation is living inspiration from something totally beyond us. In society, the Fermentation experience is the basis of religion and mystical awareness.

Physiologically, Fermentation is the rousing of living energy (*chi* or *kundalini*) in the body to heal and vivify. It is expressed as vibratory tones and spoken truths emerging from the Throat or Mercury Chakra. On the planetary level, it is the evolution of life to produce consciousness in matter.

Operation 6: Distillation

The Azoth's sixth ray points to the feather, symbol of Air and indicating the process of spiritualization. This ray is usually colored indigo, although it is shown as white or light gray. It is marked with the symbol for silver and the Moon.

Distillation is the sixth of the major operation in alchemy, and it is represented in the sixth circle by a unicorn lying on the ground in front of a rose bush. According to legend, the unicorn runs tirelessly from pursuers but lies meekly on the ground when approached by a virgin. The virgin is the purified matter at hand, which has returned to a state of innocence and potential. Above the circle is the word *Occultum*, meaning secret or hidden, since the essences at the beginning of this stage are invisible.

Distillation is a key process on all levels of alchemy. It involves releasing volatile essences from their prison in matter and condensing them in a purified form. In practical terms, this involves heating a substance until it boils, and then condensing the vapors into a purified liquid. In the Lesser Work of purification in the first three operations, sulfurous and mercurial substances are distilled into a clarified and purer form. In the Greater Work of rebirth, the process takes on an infinite aspect, as substances are continually distilled and circulated in a sealed vessel. Repeated Distillation produces an extremely concentrated solution the alchemists called the "Mother of the Stone." In a kind of Distillation known as sublimation, the vapors condense directly into solid powder at the top of the distilling apparatus and remain "fixed" there. Distillation is described in the Emerald Tablet as: "It rises from Earth to Heaven and descends again to Earth, thereby combining within Itself the powers of both the Above and the Below."

The alchemical symbol for Distillation is the alembic, which is a hood that fits over the boiling fluid, condensing the rising vapors, and directing the purified condensate via a funnel or tube to a collecting

vessel. Images include complicated distillation trains with multiple piping into tall vessels, large turning wheels, baptismal fonts, a rain of purified dew, the lotus flower, a five-petaled rose, the Rosy Cross, the unicorn, white doves, and the Pelican. The Pelican was thought to sacrifice its own blood to feed its young, and it is also the name of a feedback-distillation apparatus. Sometimes this crucial step is represented by flames ascending into the sky or a dragon in flames with its tail in its mouth. Dream images include flying, climbing to the tops of mountains, or confronting mountain lions or eagles.

In the laboratory, Distillation is the boiling and condensation of the fermented solution to increase its purity, which is why this is known as the White Stage of alchemy. Psychologically, this agitation and sublimation of psychic forces is necessary to ensure that no impurities from the lower personality are incorporated into the next and final process. "It rises from Earth to Heaven and descends again to Earth" is how the tablet describes Distillation, which represents the second or higher application of the Water Element in the tablet. The alchemists thought of this phase as working with the heavenly substance Mercury to extract and refashion the metals. The Ferment, the soft amalgam or balsam resulting from this operation must be hardened into a Stone before it can be made permanent, and the final phase of Distillation is a Sublimation in which vapor turns solid, or the spirit is made corporeal. Chemical Distillation is the boiling and condensation of a solution to increase its concentration and purity. Chemically, it is the boiling and condensation of the fermented solution to increase its purity, such as takes place in the distilling of wine to make brandy

Psychologically, Distillation is the agitation and sublimation of psychic forces is necessary to ensure that no impurities from the inflated ego or deeply submerged id are incorporated into the next and final stage. Personal Distillation consists of a variety of introspective techniques that raise the content of the psyche to the highest level possible, free from sentimentality and emotions, cut off even from one's personal identity. Distillation is the purification of the unborn Self -- all that we truly are and can be. In society, the Distillation experience is expressed as science and objective experimentation.

Physiologically, Distillation is raising the life force repeatedly from the lower regions in the cauldron of the body to the brain (what Oriental alchemists called the Circulation of the Light), where it eventually becomes a wondrous solidifying light full of power. Distillation is said to culminate in the Third Eye area of the forehead, at the level of the pituitary and pineal glands, in the Brow or Silver Chakra. On the Planetary level, Distillation is the realization of the power of higher love, as the life force on the entire planet gradually seeks to become one force in nature based on a shared vision of Truth.

Operation 7: Coagulation

The seventh ray of the Azoth points to the realm of the Queen and contains the symbol that stands for both the metal gold and the Sun. It is at the feminine level of soul where masculine consciousness is transformed, and this ray is usually colored lavender or purple, indicating the true royalty of the King.

The final, seventh circle shows an androgynous youth emerging from an open grave, with the Latin word *Lapidem*, meaning "the Stone," on the outer ring next to it. This is the operation of Coagulation, in which the fermented Child of the Conjunction is fused with the sublimated spiritual presence released during Distillation. The resurrection of the soul is accomplished by bringing together only the purest essences of one's body and soul into the light of meditation. In other words, Coagulation incarnates and releases the "Ultima Materia" of the soul that the Emerald Tablet described as the "Glory of the Whole Universe." Coagulation is the second or higher application of the elements Air and

Earth in the tablet, and it results in a union of spirit with matter. At this stage, the alchemists felt they were working with the "new" or resurrected Salt.

Coagulation images include, a soaring eagle, brilliantly shining gold, scales of justice, an egg-shaped Stone, a heavenly-scented balsam, the elixir or ambrosia (food of immortality), wingless creatures borne away by winged creatures, the serpent and lion united, and the Phoenix (a mythical bird that repeatedly rose from the fire). The event is also indicated by the King and Queen breaking free of their chains to matter and appearing as naked Sol and Luna (personages with heads of the Sun and Moon respectively). One drawing of this stage shows a purple moon fallen to the earth with a red bird ascending into the sky. In alchemical metallurgy, the baser metals are transformed into incorruptible gold during this stage. In many alchemical experiments, Coagulation is the precipitation or sublimation of the purified Ferment from Distillation.

On the mental level, Coagulation is first sensed as a new confidence that is beyond all things, though many experience it as a Second Body of golden coalesced light, a permanent vehicle of consciousness that embodies the highest aspirations and evolution of mind. Coagulation incarnates and releases the *Ultima Materia* of the soul, the Astral Body, which the alchemists also referred to it as the Greater or Philosopher's Stone. Using this magical Stone, the alchemists believed they could exist on all levels of reality. In society, it is the living wisdom in which everyone exists within the same light of evolved consciousness and knowledge of Truth.

On the bodily level, this stage is marked by the release of the Elixir in the blood that rejuvenates the body into a perfect vessel of health. A brain ambrosia is said to be released through the interaction of light from the phallic-shaped pineal gland and matter from the vulva of the pituitary. This heavenly food or *viaticum* both nourishes and energizes the cells without any waste products being produced. These physiological and psychological processes create the Second Body, a body of solid light that emerges through the Crown or Gold Chakra. On the planetary level, Coagulation is a return to the Garden of Eden, this time on a higher level in tune with the divine mind.

The Hidden Keys to the Azoth

There are deeper secrets contained in the Azoth drawing that are only revealed through meditation. Although there are only seven operations shown, there is another implied or eighth step in the mandala. This secret is suggested by the fact that while there are eight circles depicting corresponding to operations there are only seven rays labeled. Only deeper meditation on this drawing will reveal the unlabeled eighth ray.

Begin your meditation by entering a relaxed and open state of consciousness while staring directly at the face in the center of the mandala. Many alchemists have actually replaced the central image with a small round mirror to facilitate this introspective process. While staring at the center of the mandala, try to incorporate into your peripheral view all the alchemical images of King and Queen, Spirit and Soul that are present. Go slowly and intuitively and try to feel a sense of increased meaning and inspiration, as you begin your journey through the operations.

First look at each ray in order, beginning with the black ray of Calcination. Observe the symbols on the ray and its position on the "Star in Man." Then move your attention clockwise to the circle explaining the operation of transformation to be performed here. Look at the scene depicted and try to get a feeling of actually being in the scene and witnessing what it depicts. Continue this way all around the

mandala until you reach the final operation of Coagulation that shows the androgynous youth emerging from the grave. This is a clue for you to do the same in your meditation with the mandala.

Sit back now and stare at the whole drawing. In other words, free yourself from the dead grave of the flat, square picture in which you have buried your consciousness in this meditation. Let your attention be free and see where it lands. In almost every case, you will be drawn to the black ray at position one, which points to the Cubic Stone. This is the Salt or unpurified matter at the beginning of the Work, as well as the new Salt or Stone at the end of the Work.

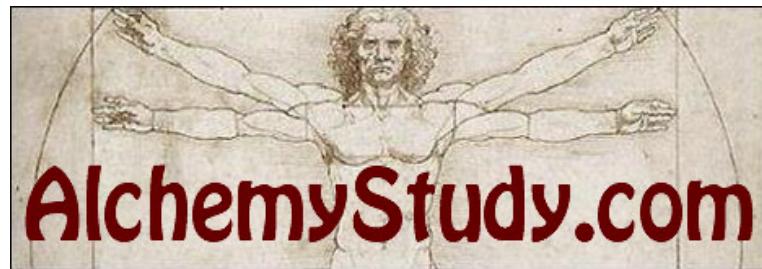


Further meditation on the meaning of this "eighth" ray leads us directly above this ray to the crowning sphere of Conjunction. This is the operation that works with Earth to manifest the new Salt in material reality. It is also the turning point between the Below and the Above. In other words, the operation associated with the hidden eighth step is Conjunction. It is the beginning and end of the Work. Some alchemists felt so strongly about this that they actually changed the entire process to show the final step of transformation depicted by gold and the Sun in ray number four instead of ray number seven. In any drawings based on Basil Valentine's version that appeared in his *Azoth des Philosophes* (1659), the Sun and its metal are shown in this Ray of Conjunction instead of in the final Ray of Coagulation.

This is an overwhelming confirmation of the importance of the ancient alchemical principle known as the Law of the Octaves. Just as the seven first notes in the musical scale lead to an eighth note that is a repetition of the first at a higher level of vibration, so do the seven operations of alchemy lead to a return to the realm of matter at a higher frequency of consciousness. In other words, the goal of alchemy is not to remain in the realm of spirit, as it is in all the Abrahamic religions. Like Buddhist and Taoist doctrine, the goal is become purified in the realm of spirit and then return to the earth as seeds of spirit. The Great Work of alchemy is nothing less than the "consecration of the Whole Universe" as the Emerald Tablet tells us. It is the coagulation of spirit in matter, the full awakening of the hidden spark of light and consciousness that is trapped in matter. That can only be accomplished by a second Conjunction, a Sacred Marriage between Soul and Spirit that takes place on both the Vertical Axis and the Horizontal Axis of reality. This is the true message of the Rosicrucians, Kaballists, and mystical Christians. To bring spirit or the divine will into the world, we must sacrifice ourselves at the center of the cross of matter.

There is also one last message hidden in the Azoth drawing. All the Latin words contained in the outer ring that connects the rays of transformation spell out a summary of what has taken place: *Visita Interiora Terrae Rectificando Inuenies Occultum Lapidem*. This condensation of the operations means "Visit the innermost parts of the earth; and by setting things right ("rectifying"), you will find the hidden Stone." Furthermore, the first letter of these seven Latin words spells out "VITRIOL." This biting and highly corrosive liquid fire is symbolic of the soulful energy that drives the whole wheel of transformation. It is both the fundamental acid that drives chemical change and the inner Secret Fire, sometimes likened to a spiritual hormone, which brings about the bodily and spiritual perfection of the alchemist.

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